

The Role of the Promotor(a) Community Health Worker

A promotora/community health worker is defined as a person who, with or without compensation:



- provides cultural mediation between their communities and health and human service systems
- provides informal counseling and social support
- provides culturally and linguistically appropriate health education
- advocates for individual and community needs
- assures people get the services they need
- builds individual and community capacity
- provides referral and follow-up services

Online Source: <<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/library/chw.shtm>>
Texas Department of State Health Services website

The first systematic use of CHWs took place in China. After the Chinese Revolution of 1949, Mao Tse Tung instituted the Barefoot Doctor Program, a program where workers brought basic health care to rural populations and addressed such issues as nutrition, vaccinations, and sanitation. [1]

The *promotoras* grass roots program got its start in Central America in the 1960s as a peer health-educator program to train Latina women about various health topics.

The largest system to formally use the skills of CHWs in the U.S. was established, when the Indian Health Service adopted the Community Health Representative Program from the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1968. [2]

Many health programs are turning to community health workers and promotores de salud (CHWs) for their unique ability to serve as "bridges" between community members and health care services. [3]

One of the most important features of CHW programs is that they strengthen already existing community network ties [4]

1. Nuestra Comunidad Sana. *Background information on lay health promoters*. 2004. Retrieved May 10, 2005. <<http://community.gorge.net/ncs/background/promoters.htm>>

2. Rosenthal, E.L., et al. *A summary of the National Community Health Advisor Study: Weaving the future*. Tucson, AZ. 1998. The University of Arizona, The Rural Health Office of the Mel & Enid Zuckerman Arizona College of Public Health.

3. American Public Health Association Resolution "Recognition and Support for Community Health Workers' Contributions to Meeting Our Nation's Health Care Needs." 2002.

4. Israel B. Social networks and social support: Implications for natural helper and community level interventions. 1985. *Health Educ Q*, 12, 65-80.

